

FLOOD INSURANCE . . . ARE YOU COVERED?

By Anne Donovan, CZM

The winds are whipping and the furious seas are lashing against the crumbling seawall. As the waters rise in one immense tidal surge, the seawall, the road behind it, and the entire first story of your house are awash. Knee-deep in this briny mess is not the time to start thinking about flood insurance.

Every year, floods damage more U.S. homes than any other type of natural disaster. And it's not just the houses along the shore or a riverbank at risk. In fact, 20 to 25 percent of flood insurance claims are outside areas considered "high-risk" for floods.

Bottom line, your homeowner's policy does not cover flood damage. If you are expecting federal disaster relief to save the day in case of a major flood, you will be in for a long wait and will most likely get a loan that has to be repaid with interest, if disaster relief becomes available at all. So, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is your best bet for protecting what is probably your biggest investment.

The NFIP, created by Congress in 1968 and managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), makes federally backed insurance available in communities that develop and enforce floodplain management mechanisms. The NFIP flood-proofing standards also offer a great benefit to homeowners, with houses meeting these standards suffering 77 percent less flood damage than other homes. (In addition, FEMA's *Coastal Construction Manual* provides state-of-the-art recommendations for flood-proofing and storm protection. See *Coastal Construction Manual: A Great Tool for Protecting Homes from Storm Damage* on page 24 for details.)

Almost all communities in the Commonwealth

participate in the NFIP. The only coastal communities that don't are Chilmark and Rowley, so citizens in those towns cannot obtain flood insurance. In addition, those communities are not eligible for federal financial assistance (including many forms of disaster assistance) for property acquisition or construction within a Special Flood Hazard Area (an area prone to flooding and designated on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps with the letter "A" or "V").

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- Richard Zingarelli, DEM

"Joining the NFIP is not difficult for a community, and we can help," said Richard Zingarelli of the Flood Hazard Management Program (FHMP) at the Department of Environmental Management (DEM). "Nearly all of the community requirements are already covered by existing state regulations, such as the Wetlands Protection Act and the State Building Code. The few remaining requirements are typically handled by establishing a floodplain overlay district within the community's zoning bylaw, a copy of which can be obtained from FHMP." For more information, contact Rich at (617) 626-1406 or by e-mail, Richard.Zingarelli@state.ma.us.

Maps are available to help you determine your flood risk, and there's plenty of information on NFIP. To find out more, check out the FEMA Web site at <http://www.fema.gov/nfip/index>, call your insurance agent, or call FEMA at 1-888-FLOOD29, TDD# 1-800-427-5593.

100-YEAR FLOODS DON'T COME ON SCHEDULE

What, exactly, is a "100-year flood?" A flood that happens every 100 years? Nope. This confusing and often mis-used term is really a statistical assessment, indicating that a flood of that magnitude (or greater) has a 1-percent chance of occurring in any given year, with a typical recurrence every 100 years. To help clarify, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has stopped using the term, opting instead for "1-percent annual chance flood." Just because such a major flood happens in one year does not reduce the likelihood of that event the next year. Each year, no matter what has happened before, the chance of seeing that kind of flood is 1 percent.

The statistics can get even more confusing. For any particular 100-year period, there is a 63.5 percent chance of having a "1-percent annual chance flood." Confused? Over long periods of time these events are likely to happen every 100 years, but over any particular 100-year period, the chances are less simply because these things are not scheduled and are not absolutely predictable. From a more practical perspective, over the typical life of a mortgage (30 years), there is a 26 percent chance of seeing a "100-year flood." If that statistic makes you nervous, see Flood Insurance . . . Are You Covered? at left for more information.

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